

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

An observation of *Acritoscincus trilineatum* in a Wedge-tailed Shearwater colony on Rottneest Island – As its common name suggests, the South-western Cool Skink *Acritoscincus trilineatum* (formerly *Bassiana trilineata*) occurs in temperate, south-western Australia, where it is generally associated with lakes, swamps, water courses and other damplands (Bush *et al.* 1995; Storr *et al.* 1999). *A. trilineatum* has previously been recorded on Rottneest Island, off the coast of Perth, Western Australia, where it was described as 'scarce' (Storr 1984) and 'uncommon' (Brooker *et al.* 1995). The Western Australian Museum has six specimens from Rottneest Island; one collected in each of 1954, 1960 and 1961, with no specific location details, and three collected in 1986 from the Bickley Swamp area (data courtesy of R. How). The most westerly recording of this species on Rottneest Island is Narro neck (J. Dell, pers. comm.). Storr (1984) noted that *A. trilineatum* was confined to damp areas in the vicinity of freshwater seepages, but recent biological surveys on the island suggest that the species is not so strictly associated with swamps or seeps (J. Dell, pers. comm.).

On 14 May 2003 I hand-captured a single, live specimen while working in the Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* colony at Radar Reef, on the south-western tip of Rottneest Island. The snout-vent length of the animal was 43 mm, the total length 119 mm and it weighed 1.7

g. The site of capture was less than 2 m above sea level, and within 10 m of the edge of the reef platform (0354244 E, 6455582 N). The surrounding vegetation was dominated by Iceplant *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* and Coastal Saltbush *Atriplex cinerea* growing in coarse sand over the shearwater burrows. This capture represents a westerly extension of the range of *A. trilineatum* on Rottneest Island.

Characteristics of the site are comparable with the known ecological requirements of *A. trilineatum*. *M. crystallinum* is a succulent annual, that traps a humid air layer between its foliage and the ground surface (Rippey and Rowland 1995; W. Bancroft pers. obs.). Although this plant dies off by mid-summer each year, the combination of *M. crystallinum* and the shearwater burrows obviously provide suitably humid refugia to support *A. trilineatum*.

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Observations of *Aprasia repens* on Rottnest Island – Worm lizards in the genus *Aprasia* are predominantly fossorial and their ecology is not well understood (Storr *et al.* 1990; Webb and Shine 1994; Cogger 2000). Existing information has largely been deduced from dissection of museum specimens (Webb and Shine 1994). Opportunistic observations of the behaviour of live specimens are therefore particularly valuable in supplementing the museum data.

On 14 April 2003 I unearthed two separate pairs of the South-western Sandplain Worm Lizard *Aprasia repens*, while collecting soil samples at Radar Reef, Rottnest Island (0354463 E, 6455883 N). Remarkably the two unearthings came from only five localised instances of soil sampling.

Both pairs were located within 30 mm of the soil surface in a dense mat of roots and were associated with the underground burrow systems and nests of the ant *Camponotus* sp. The surface vegetation was dominated by *Olearia axillaris*, *Westringia dampiera*, and *Acanthocarpus preissii*. These observations support previous findings that *A. repens* frequent root mats (Cogger 2000), and that they forage predominantly on ant larvae and pupae (greater than 95% of gut contents: Webb and Shine 1994).

Each of the Rottnest Island pairs comprised one larger (approximately 110 mm) and one smaller (approximately 90 mm) individual in close proximity (10–30 mm). A study by Patchell and Shine (1986) measured *A. repens* specimens from the Sydney Museum and found mean snout-vent lengths (SVL) of were 83.7 mm for males and 108.0 mm for females. Similarly, for Western Australian and South Australian specimens, Webb and Shine (1994) reported mean SVL of 89.9 mm and 107.8 mm for male and female *A. repens*, respectively. It is likely that each of the Rottnest Island pairs comprised a male and female animal.

While the timing of copulation and fertilisation has not been recorded for *A. repens*, Webb and Shine (1994) noted that females were gravid during November and December, and males had enlarged testes from August to November. It is probable that *A. repens* oviposits immediately after a spring mating. If my observations represent reproductive pairs, then